

## AFRICA IN AMERICA

### **Migrants Are Welcomed in West Philadelphia**

#### **TESTIMONY TO PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL IN SUPPORT OF THE PENNSYLVANIA COMPACT, JUNE 28, 2011**

Good morning, Councilmembers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Anne O'Callaghan and I am the president and CEO of the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians.

The Welcoming Center is a nonprofit economic development organization. Each year, we place more than 300 work-authorized immigrants in jobs across our region. From lab technicians to electrical engineers to nurses, the men and women we work with are eager to apply their talents in their new country.

And it is not just their talents. Philadelphia also benefits from the sales, property, and wage taxes paid by immigrant residents of our city – and the revenue generated by those who live outside the city and travel here to work or to shop.

Let's talk numbers. Immigrants make up 11% of the labor force in the Philadelphia region. Compared to many other American cities, immigrants here are more likely to work in managerial or professional occupations. In fact, they represent nearly one-third of all such workers in our region.

Those workers command substantial wages – with median annual earnings of USD60,000 to USD80,000 per year depending on the specific occupation. Those earnings return to our local economy through sales, property and income taxes as well as through consumer spending.

Immigrants also start businesses. The Welcoming Center has studied commercial corridors across our city, and from Baltimore Avenue to 52nd Street to Washington Avenue, the answer is the same: More than 50% of all businesses on those corridors were launched by immigrants.

In addition to generating sales and property taxes, these businesses create jobs: An average of 4 employees per store, on 1 typical corridor. Often, immigrant merchants are employing American-born workers.

Beyond mom-and-pop stores, immigrants are responsible for some of the biggest and fastest-growing companies in the United States today. A recent report from the Partnership for a New American Economy, a national alliance of which Mayor Nutter is a member, found that 18% of Fortune 500 companies had an immigrant founder.

That means nearly 1 in 5 Fortune 500 companies were launched by a newcomer to our country. The 2010 revenue of their companies amount to a USD1.7 trillion dollars – and one of them, Comcast, is headquartered right here in Philadelphia.



***Dr Nina Ahmad (Chair of Mayor's Commission on Asian American Affairs), Mr Stan Straughter (Chair of Mayor's Commission on African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs) and Mrs Anne O'Callaghan (CEO of the Welcoming Center). They participated in a panel discussion in Philadelphia in May 2009 hosted by Philadelphia public radio station, WHYY. All three gave testimony in support of seamless integration of immigrants into the USA. Also giving testimony was the publisher of MJoTA.***



Our city also benefits from the international talent attracted by our colleges and universities. These men and women are conducting the research that will lead to the innovative technologies of tomorrow. A study by Duke University's Vivek Wadhwa quantified their role, finding that in 2006, immigrant inventors were named on 24% of all patent applications nationwide.

Finally, amidst the sound and fury of the immigration debate, it's important to note that unauthorized

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**Councilmember Mrs Janie Blackwell is an avid supporter of African and Caribbean migrants and is the political force the Mayor's Commission on African and Caribbean Affairs. Above, 4th from left. Below, second from right.**



immigrants are also contributing to our region's economic health. The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimated this spring that unauthorized immigrants in Pennsylvania pay \$35 million a year in personal income taxes, \$7 million a year in property taxes, and \$93 million in sales taxes.

There are many reasons for Philadelphia to celebrate the immigrant members of our community. I've just enumerated a number of them – but I'd like to add one more. As an immigrant myself, one thing I do

not take for granted is the history of America. The magic of this country is the opportunity that it allows, including the opportunity for a young woman from Ballybay, Ireland, to build her own future here. Where I come from, no one asked, "Do you like your job?" They asked, "Do you have a job?" In Philadelphia, I found that job – and a great deal more besides. Like today's immigrants, I married and raised a family. I even started my own business, and eventually sold it. So I know a little about this American dream. And I'm mindful of the need to keep the doors of opportunity open for the next generation of dreamers and do-ers, whether they come from across an ocean or just across the Schuylkill River.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

*By Anne O'Callaghan*

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